

MaineHealth

Testimony of Sarah Calder, MaineHealth In Opposition to LD 172, “An Act to Allow Health Care Workers to Return to Work by Reinstating Exemptions from Immunization Requirements” Monday, April 24, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, I am Sarah Calder, Senior Government Affairs Director at MaineHealth, and I am here to testify in opposition to LD 172, “An Act to Allow Health Care Workers to Return to Work by Reinstating Exemptions from Immunization Requirements.”

MaineHealth is a non-profit health care system that provides the full continuum of health care services to the residents of eleven counties in Maine and one in New Hampshire through its nine acute care hospitals, physician practices, lab, home health care services, and an integrated continuum of inpatient and community-based behavioral health services. Every day, MaineHealth’s 22,000 care team members work tirelessly to support our vision of “Working together so our communities are the healthiest in America,” by providing safe, high-quality care to the residents in our service area.

As part of that work, and in an effort to deliver on our values of excellence, respect, and being patient-centered, MaineHealth has made a promise to our communities to consistently deliver safe and high-quality patient care. In order to achieve this goal, we must do everything we can to prevent the spread of disease, including getting vaccinated.

In 2019, MaineHealth was a strong supporter of LD 798 (now Chapter 154), which removed the philosophical and religious exemptions from immunization requirements for students in schools and health care workers. And it is important to note that the law passed by the 129th Legislature, includes the availability of medical exemptions to a parent or health care professional who provides a written statement from a licensed physician, nurse practitioner or physician assistance that determined, in their professional judgement, that immunizations against one or more diseases may be medically inadvisable.

In 2020, the Maine voters overwhelming supported Maine’s vaccine law. In fact, 73% of voters chose to uphold Chapter 154 and the elimination of the religious and philosophical exemptions to the State’s vaccine requirements. Maine voters have spoken – they support public health and ensuring our most vulnerable are protected from the threat of vaccine-preventable diseases.

Almost four years after LD 798 became law – and one pandemic later – MaineHealth is still a strong supporter of the law because we know that vaccinations protect both our care team members and those they interact with, including patients, co-workers, loved ones, and the communities in which they live.

Restoring the religious and philosophical exemptions to the State’s vaccine requirements would undermine the tremendous progress made due to the passage of Chapter 154. I urge you to listen

to Maine voters and reject any legislation that seeks to restore the religious and philosophical exemptions to the State's vaccine requirements.

Thank you for your time and consideration and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.